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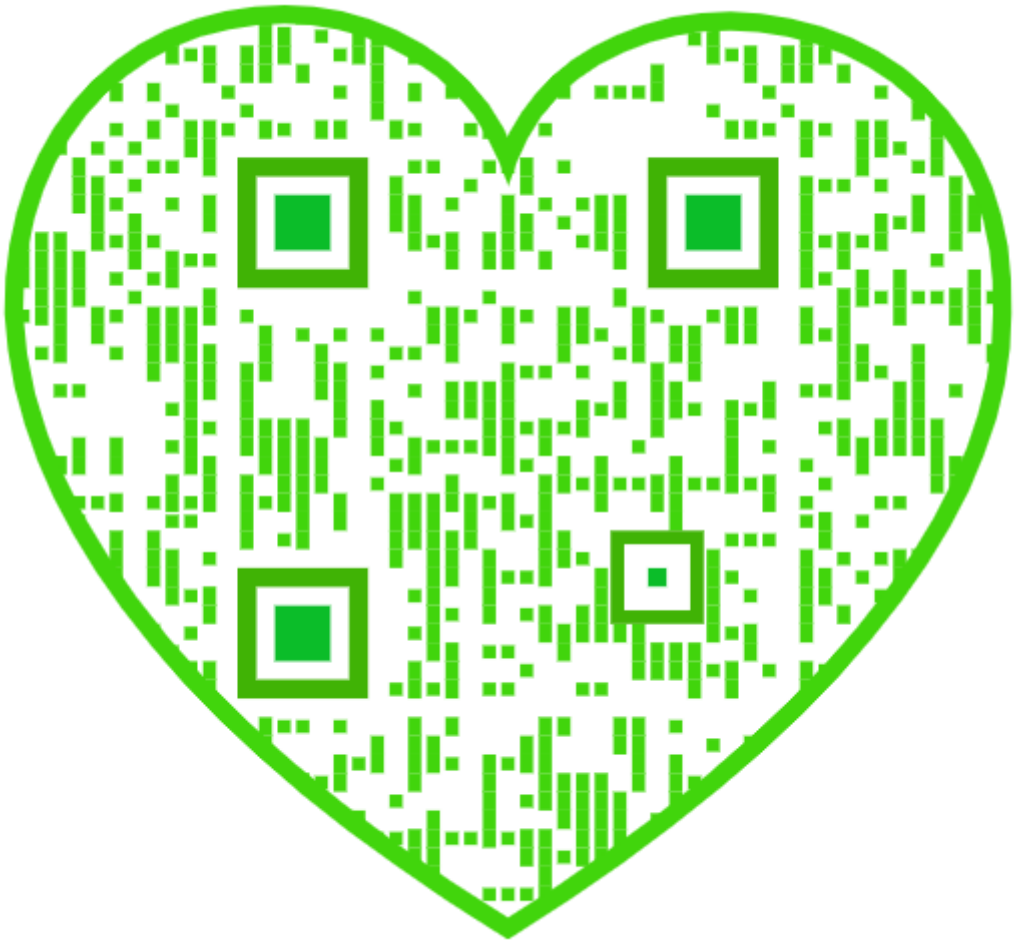

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THE COLOUR-PRINTS OF JAPAN

AN APPRECIATION AND HISTORY

BY

EDWARD F. STRANGE

ASSISTANT KEEPER IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM
AND MEMBER OF THE JAPAN SOCIETY

Author of

"JAPANESE ILLUSTRATION," ETC.

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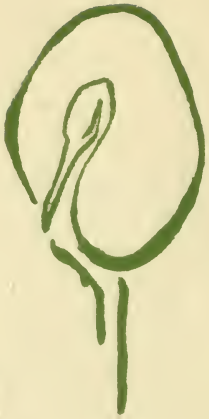

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

FOR something more than a century Europeans have been more or less aware that the Japanese had a not ignoble school of wood-engraving. But the few examples sold to Dutch merchants at the end of the eighteenth century seem entirely to have escaped the notice of the old writers on the art of engraving, or to have been so strongly in opposition to the principles of their faith as to be deliberately ignored. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century was well advanced that certain artists—among whom it will suffice to name Degas and Monet—possessing specimens, were not slow to appreciate their charm and even to bow, in a measure, to their influence. Even then, popular interest was but slowly aroused ; and the great

stimulus came eventually from Paris, at the call of the De Goncourt and their intimates, among whom MM. Gillot, Bing, Gonse and Hayashi were especially pre-eminent in this matter. During the last decade or so, the artistic value of Japanese colour-prints has also been widely recognised in this country, in Germany, and in the United States. And the old idea of them, as mere trifles of art, curious, perhaps bizarre, but in no way important, has now given place to universal recognition of the fact that, in the art of printing in colour from wood-blocks, Japan has been absolutely unequalled among the nations.

The neglect of the Japanese by European writers on wood-engraving is all the more inexplicable, since the former had by no means an exclusive use of the peculiar technical process by which their prints were produced. The description of this, which follows, will make it clear that, in all essentials, it was identical with that of the so-called *chiaroscuro* prints of Italy and Germany which appeared in large numbers during the sixteenth century. That these had anything to do with the origin of the art in Japan is, as I have pointed out elsewhere, at least possible, but, so far, without proof of any kind. A considerable presumption in favour

of the theory would be set up if it could be shown that the Jesuit missionaries to Japan, or the Japanese Embassy of 1582–85 to Rome, had taken out with them religious pictures executed in this manner; and, with the mere indication of this possibility, the question must, for the present, be allowed to rest.

The technique of the colour-prints of Japan is capable of simple description. The amazing thing about it is that the perfectly harmonious results obtained in the best period, were the product of the united labours of three separate individuals. In the first place, an artist made the design, drawing the lines with a brush on thin, semi-transparent paper. This was handed over to the engraver, who, pasting it face downwards to secure the necessary reversal on a block of soft cherrywood (*sakura*), proceeded to outline the picture with a knife and then cut away the superfluous wood, using a series of chisels and gouges much the same as those employed by the European carpenter. The result was the key-block of the forthcoming series; for, from proofs of this, a further series of blocks was cut, the final result being one for each separate colour to be employed. At this stage, the third person of the trio takes up the work, namely, the

printer. He mixed his colours on the block for each printing, the medium being rice paste, and the pigments natural and easily obtained for the most part. The blocks are not printed in a press, but the paper—that wonderfully fine and tough mulberry-bark paper of Japan—is damped, laid on the upper surface of the block, and the impression rubbed off with a rubber (*baren*), consisting essentially of a coil of twisted fibre enclosed in a sheaf of bamboo leaf. Each block is thus used in succession until the whole design is complete, accuracy of register being secured by rough indications cut on the blocks, and by a perfection of handicraftsmanhip almost incomprehensible to the European. Among further refinements of printing are to be mentioned the use of metallic dusts ; and especially, in the *surimono* (see below), a species of effective blind-printing or *gauffrage*, producing a high relief without colour. In certain cases this is said by the Japanese to have been obtained by using the point of the elbow as a rubber.

The artist was generally an independent worker and, of course, was the most reputable of the three. It is by his name that the prints are always known, but it is worth pointing out that there are no

authentic instances of his having engraved and printed his own pictures. The engraver, whose powers of fac-simile reproduction are simply marvellous, and the printer, were simply workmen in the employment of the publisher, who in many cases appears to have been himself an engraver, but in none a printer. Sometimes the publisher actually maintained an artist in his own house.

Prints were, as will have been gathered from the above remarks, published and sold in shops much in our manner. Many of them appeared in sets under fanciful and poetic titles. The price was the merest trifle, and the purchasers belonged to the working classes of Japan, or, at highest, to the *samurai*, or military class, who visited Yedo in the train of their lords when the latter came yearly to the Court of the Shogun, who, until 1868, was the actual ruler of the Empire. With the exception of some few late artists working at the capital of the Mikado, Kyōto, and an interesting school at Ōsaka which flourished during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the whole art belongs to Yedo (Tōkyō), so that one generic name for the prints is *Yedo-ye* (Yedo pictures).

The prints produced by these simple means are,

as said above, of extreme technical excellence. The colours are invariably harmonious; the composition absolutely right; the bold, direct strokes of the brush rendered with surprising faithfulness. A convention has, of course, as in all pictorial art, to be accepted, and it is often far removed from that of European schools. But, once this is grasped, the truth of the presentment is of a high order, and, above all, one is struck by its perfect adaptation to the possibilities of the technique. In this quality the Japanese artist of every kind is supreme. He knows the possibilities of his tools to perfection, and, in his great and reticent strength, never tries to go beyond them. Of him, above all others, it can more often be said with truth, that in his self-appointed task he never fails.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL CONDITIONS

NO art can be properly understood without some knowledge of the conditions which called it into being; and of the attendant circumstances among which it was produced. In the case of that now under discussion, much misunderstanding has arisen by generalisations, based on the hasty assumption that the environment and social status of the Japanese designer of colour-prints was pretty much the same as that of a European painter. Nothing could be farther removed from the fact. In the eyes of his fellows he was merely an artisan, of rank akin to that of the carpenter, for example, and beneath that of the peasant and shop-keeper. The painter of Japan, on the other hand, was an aristocrat, by patronage at all events. He lived with the great feudal

nobles, held office in their establishments or that of the Mikado or Shogun even, and worked under their auspices. Painting, in Japan, has been a high art for twelve centuries. It has its schools, distinguishable by their method as much as by their choice of subject ; and each of these has had its renascences, its ebbing and flowing of popularity. Moreover, each is alive at the present day ; and the Japanese critic easily places a painter, by immemorial canons of art which have never lost their force, in the group to which he belongs. In a way, these schools are hereditary, and it is rare for a devotee of one to attempt the practice of the method of another. But they were always of the aristocracy ; and among them, the style of the colour-printer found no acceptance. Once in a while, one finds a tradition of aristocratic patronage of the art of the people : as when Hokusai appeared before the Shogun and painted maple-leaves floating on the surface of a river, by dipping the feet of a cock in the colour and directing his footsteps across a huge wash of blue. But this was merely, in his patron's eyes, the trick of a clever conjurer ; and was never considered, by Hokusai himself, as serious art.

The colour-print makers, then, were artisans: their patrons mainly of similar low degree. They affected the styles of one of the Schools of Painting, that called *Kano* for the most part; and kept up a tradition of master and pupil for all the world like their great models. After all, they were painters. They prided themselves more on their paintings than on their colour-prints—the necessary pot-boiling of the class. And the school in which they are placed by the Japanese included more than one of artistic distinction who never worked for the print-sellers. To this is given the name of *Ukiyo-ye*, "Mirror of the Passing World."

An easy explanation of this title, and of the low estimation, in Japan, of its holder, is to be found. The painter of the great schools of Japan is essentially a symbolist. Everything he does conveys some subtle allusion or imagery. Realism, in his eyes, is unintellectual vulgarity. And when this new school arose, devoting itself to the common life of everyday people of low social standing, either without poetic suggestion altogether, or only with such as savoured of looseness or even immorality, it was inevitable that it should be absolutely tabooed by all of good taste. In one of the most rigid

aristocracies the world has ever seen, this was the art of the lower orders—and despised accordingly.

Europeans gain by their ignorance, in the consideration of Japanese pictorial art. They fail to grasp the inwardness of the paintings or the suggested vulgarity of the prints. In the former case this is a pity, for they lose much beauty of thought; in the latter it is best, for, from the simple standpoint of artistic merit, the prints must take a very high place.

The actual social standing of the colour-print artists, and the necessarily ephemeral nature of their training, can best be illustrated by two or three definite but typical cases. Thus, the first Toyokuni was the son of a maker of puppets; Kunisada began life as the keeper of a ferry-boat; and Hokkei, the greatest pupil of Hokusai, as a fish-hawker—costermonger, to use our phrase. Yet all these appear to have had no difficulty in becoming manifest artists of great technical skill. The explanation probably lies in the inherent good taste of the Japanese as a nation, and the fact that the mere method of teaching a Japanese child to write is in itself an education in that kind of drawing which forms the basis of all the various schools.

PORTRAIT OF AN ACTOR

The subjects chosen by the designers of colour-prints are of few classes. The most popular were undoubtedly portraits of actors, generally in character. The Japanese rage for the stage is a curious trait in their national character. Still more curious is the fact that, in Old Japan, it was absolutely confined to the lower orders so far as its outward expression went. No person of good family dared openly to patronise the drama. But with the common people it was an overwhelming passion. The actors, as a class, were objects of what one can only call infatuation—on the stage. But, as human beings, they ranked below the lowest of the artisans —lower even in the social scale than did the strolling players of early Elizabethan times. The colour-print makers, dependent on them for a living, treated them with open contumely in such personal intercourse as was necessary. And those of the former who held aloof from the making of theatrical scenes and portraits prided themselves, and in the Japanese biographies are still honoured, for their abstention from the socially contaminating influence.

Nothing puts the whole matter better into scale than the fact that no such stigma seems to have been attached, among their fellows, to the artists

who, avoiding the personages of the drama, devoted themselves almost exclusively to the delineation of the famous beauties of the Yoshiwara and of the tea-houses. Among the aristocracy, worship of the courtesan in this form has never been countenanced to this day. And the selection of these two prevailing classes of subject explains almost in itself the contempt openly expressed by the Japanese nobility—and the author has had personal experience of it—for the whole art of colour-printing.

The other subjects of note are historical and traditional stories, rarely treated with the same breadth and artistic effect as the two foregoing classes; and landscapes, made chiefly for the benefit of country visitors to Yedo. These latter, as well as the *surimono*, are dealt with more fully in separate chapters.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY MASTERS

THE Popular School of painting in Japan, of which colour-printing was the most important outcome, was founded (as Mr. Arthur Morrison has been the first European to show) by Iwasa Sho-i Matabei (or Matahei), a man of romantic birth and history, who was much employed by the Shogun Iyemitsu ; and died at the age of seventy-three, at Yedo, in the year 1650. He is not to be confused with his son, called Matabei II. (Katsushige) ; with an obscure Kyōto painter Tosa Sho-i ; or with Matahei of Otsu, who wrote his name differently, and died at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The two Matabei (father and son) lived long enough well to overlap the work of Moronobu, their greatest but not their only immediate successor.

Matahei of Otsu was the originator of certain cheap and scurrilous caricatures and sketches, as well as of the name *Otsuye*, to which in time a definite group of subjects became appropriated. He need not be further regarded by us.

But the Matabei were the originators of the new school in Japanese art, to which reference has just been made. It is difficult to separate the work of one from that of the other; so that we can only say in general terms of both that they were fine colourists and draughtsmen; and worked with a certain striking simplicity that was one of the reasons for the success of the new style in its later appeal to the people.

The application of this style to the art of wood-engraving was due, however, to Hishikawa Moronobu, who was born at Yasuda, in the province of Awa; the son of a maker of gold embroidery, who in his day had a great reputation. At first Moronobu made patterns for his father, then he became a dyer of cloth, and ultimately adopted the profession of a painter. He died in the year 1714, at the age of seventy-seven.

Moronobu was a painter of no little skill. His screens especially win the admiration even of the

Japanese; and show him to have excelled as a colourist. But we are concerned only with his prints. It may be said at once that these are superb specimens of the art of the draughtsman in black-and-white. He uses a strong simple line; and his massing of solid blacks is absolutely masterly. The costume of the period lends itself readily to a fine flowing arrangement of line; and in this he has hardly been surpassed. In his prints, colour does not appear, with the exception of some rare *beniye*, prints tinted with red by hand, which were the precursors of the fine combinations that were soon to follow. The prints were made for the working classes; and it is to Moronobu alone that we must ascribe the beginning of the highest form of a purely democratic art that the world has ever seen. He illustrated a large number of books, the earliest of which appeared in 1659, and the latest (dated) in 1695. The chief pupils of Moronobu were Morofusa (his son) and Moramasa.

Hitherto we have seen only the foundations laid of the art of colour-printing, in the rise of a school of design in black-and-white eminently suited to the purpose; the development of the craft of the wood-engraver to a point at which these designs

could be adequately executed; and, finally, the creation of a popular demand for the prints, wide enough to secure encouragement and a livelihood to the increasing number of artisans who were to devote themselves to the new art. Colour had only begun to be applied to wood-engravings at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in the limited form of hand-tinting in red. From this experiment a further step was easy, and we now pass into the period which saw a full and even splendid application of colours, lacquer and gold, to the wood-cuts, by hand; and even the first attempts at pure colour-printing by the use of two or more blocks.

The chief exponent of the new method was Torii Kiyonobu, who was born in 1664 and died in 1729. He worked first at Kyōto but soon settled at Yedo, which was to become the great centre of the art. At Yedo, Kiyonobu devoted himself almost entirely to work in connection with the stage; portraits of actors and theatrical posters forming his staple production. Indeed, he was chiefly employed in filling the demand for the latter at the four chief theatres of the Shogun's capital; and the largeness of method developed by this class of work constituted the characteristic of his style.

TWO LOVERS

(*Print coloured by hand*)

This theatrical work became a tradition of his followers, who rarely chose other subjects during the century or so which covers their labours. They made of it a hereditary occupation; and the profession was handed down from master to pupil, from father to son for at least five generations, all of which were distinguished by the prefix *Torii*, and used a further token of their bond of union in the adoption of the first syllable of their founder's name, *Kiyo*. In each generation, one artist was the acknowledged leader, and was styled Torii II., Torii III., and so on, as if they had been so many kings; a practice, as will be seen, afterwards common in most of the sub-sections of the colour-printers, but which first arose among the followers of Kiyonobu so far as this branch of art is concerned.

It is doubtful if Kiyonobu himself ever made any designs which were printed in colours. The Hayashi collection, so complete in all respects, contained not a single one. The same must be said of his immediate successor, his brother (or son) Kiyomasu (Torii II.); although, as the latter is definitely recorded by the Japanese writers to have introduced many improvements in the process, it is possible that some few exist. Kiyomasu was born about the

year 1679, and died in 1762. By other pupils of Kiyonobu, notably a third son, Torii Shiro (Kiyonobu II., who is by some said to have been identical with Kiyomasu) and Kiyoshige, prints are found in the making of which two and even three colour-blocks were employed. This is also the case with two other pupils of the founder of the school, Okumura Masanobu (1685–1764), one of the greatest of all, and himself the master of some notable pupils ; and Nishimura Shigenaga (1697–1756), a graceful artist, who was the master of Harunobu, perhaps the most valued of all the eighteenth-century artists.

The third Torii, Kiyomitsu I., who lived from 1735 to 1785, furnishes us with another instance of what one can only call the casual way in which these men drifted from one calling to another. To European ideas it is a thing almost inexplicable that this artist, the acknowledged head of a distinct group, should have only practised his art in his spare time ; but so it was. The trade of Kiyomitsu was the making of a musical instrument, the *samisen;* his prints, always single-sheet, were the occupation of his leisure.

This generation, belonging to the middle of the eighteenth century, begins to lose touch with the

canons of Moronobu and Kiyonobu. The range of subject widens, and a change of costume is also now to be marked. A greater richness of detail; the introduction of, if not actual landscape, yet such suggestions of it as can be furnished by a tree or flowers, are also noticeable; as is an increase of delicacy, if not of sentiment, at the expense of the strong simplicity of the earlier men. Although, in date belonging almost to the subject of the succeeding chapter, there were many artists whose touch with their leaders was yet close enough to entitle them to be dealt with here, did space allow. But a mere mention of their names must suffice—Okumura Toshinobu, Nishimura Shigenobu, Ishikawa Toyonobu, and Ishikawa Toyomasa. Each of these did fine work, generally in each of the earlier methods as well as in the later, more fully perfected, colour-printing. And a word is deserved by the leading book-illustrator of the time, Nishikawa Sukenobu, one of the most accomplished and prolific of them all, who worked (for the engravers) in black-and-white only.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ART

WE have now reached a point at which the early stages in the art of colour-printing disappear; for, after about the year 1760, prints in black-and-white alone, or tinted with red only, or with a full palette of colours applied by hand, are only found casually and very seldom at that. Some of the Japanese writers say that the actual invention of colour-printing was due to the fine artist we shall next consider, Harunobu. This is not the case; but the substratum of truth that underlies the statement rests on the fact that he undoubtedly perfected its mechanical processes; and, by the great artistic skill with which he used them, advanced the whole art to a point far beyond any it had previously attained.

Little is known of the life of Suzuki Harunobu save that he was a pupil of Nishimura Shigenaga, that he began to make colour-prints in the beginning of the Japanese period *Meiwa* (*circa* A.D. 1764), and that he died at the end of it on the fifteenth day of the sixth month of the year corresponding to 1772 of our era. He also illustrated a number of books, the earliest being dated 1762, and the last, published during his life, in 1768. But within this short space of time he produced a series of most beautiful prints, all fully printed in colours.

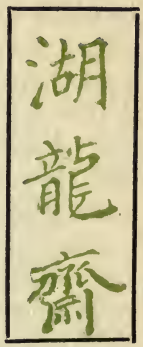
It is difficult to speak without an excess of enthusiasm about the work of this wonderful artisan. He established a new tradition in the painting of women, and the influence of his slender, graceful, exquisitely posed figures is to be traced in the work of all the most noteworthy of his immediate successors. His colour-schemes are simple but always charming, favourite and characteristic colours being a dainty apple-green and a rich, deep red. Most of his prints are of small size, but he also made a number having the customary larger dimensions, as well as of those long, narrow, panel pictures

(*hachirakaki*) which present us with such masterly solutions of one of the most difficult problems of pictorial composition. These, in the homes of the humbler Japanese, took the places of the *kakemono*, or hanging pictures, of the great. Harunobu never made theatrical pictures; his subjects are the ways of women. He is fond of what may be called an architectural setting, using in his compositions the rigid lines of room or balcony with surprising skill. Although he employs a considerable amount of detail, such as the patterns of dresses, in his pictures, they never suffer from confusion or overcrowding; and the solid black of a beam or of the head-dresses of his women, in the latter case generally lightened with a curious convention of thin white lines, is placed with rare wisdom. But the amateur of Harunobu must beware of forgeries. Many, bearing even his signature, were made by his pupil Shiba Gokan (Harunobu II.) almost within his lifetime, and in our own day the accomplished forgers of Japan have devoted more attention to this artist than to any other.

In addition to the last-named not very creditable pupil and others of little importance, Harunobu trained one man of powers almost equal to his own;

PANEL-PICTURE

for though Koriusai was a fellow-student under Nishimura Shigenaga, he is in style more closely subservient to that of Harunobu than any other artist. He, too, made colour-prints for a short time only, and, being of military rank, seems to have adopted this mode of getting a living only as a matter of unpleasant necessity. He succeeded as a painter in obtaining the official distinction of *Hokkio*, and henceforward abandoned the lower-caste art altogether. His work in this branch was done between 1770 and 1780, and he must have died soon after the latter date. As already said, it has many of the characteristics of that of Harunobu, but is broader and less refined. A bold use of bright red is quite a characteristic of his colour schemes, and in the treatment of birds and flowers he surpassed all of his predecessors.



A direct pupil of Harunobu was Kitao Shigemasa (1734–1819), an artist of considerable power and merit, who worked mainly on the same lines as his master. Bunchō (died in 1796), though taught by a painter who does not seem to have made colour-

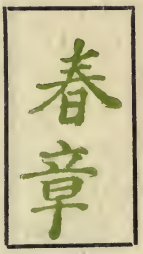
prints, Ishikawa Koyen, is also of this group. But Kitao Masayoshi and Kitao Masanobu, pupils of Shigemasa, developed characteristics of their own, in which line plays a more important part, and colour, though quite delicate and charming, shows a tendency once more to become only an accessory. A third pupil of Shigemasa, Shunman, has a distinction of his own. His colour is unobtrusive, but very charming, and his drawing of flowers almost a new thing in the art.

Contemporary with the group last described is an artist notable on his own account, as well as for the influence which he exercised on the two generations next following him. Katsukawa Shunshō, who died in 1790 at the age of sixty-seven, was perhaps a pupil of Miyagawa Shunsui. He devoted himself almost entirely to prints of actors and dancers, using a bold, virile line which, in the hands of his followers, became somewhat overdone, even to the point of exaggeration. Shunshō appreciated to the full the quaintness of the mask used by actors when on the stage, and must be credited with a certain realism, grim and not devoid of humour in the manner in which he chose to emphasise it. He attained great popularity, and it

ACTORS IN CHARACTER

(*The female part being played by a man*)

was to his prints that the appellation *Adzuma Nishikiye* was first given. His direct influence is to be traced strongly in the work of his pupil Shunkō, in that of Toyokuni I., and eventually in the interesting group of colour-print designers who lived at Ōsaka in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. But perhaps his greatest fame rests on the fact that he was the first master of Hokusai. Shunshō was an artist of considerable versatility. He made some fine *surimono*, and in several prints shows that, but for his characteristic method of drawing the figure, he could approach very nearly to Harunobu himself. Two pupils of Shunshō other than Shunkō referred to above must be briefly mentioned. Katsukawa Shunyei (1768–1819) was a powerful draughtsman, who excelled especially in pictures of battles and similar subjects, and Shunchō, a most able and charming artist, who fell entirely under the influence of a man of quite different tendencies, Torii Kiyonaga.

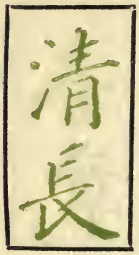


SHUN-SHŌ

We have now arrived at the period which saw colour-printing in Japan at the stage of its greatest technical possibilities, and by no means were these more

judiciously taken advantage of than by the Fourth Torii, Kiyonaga. He was born in 1742, and received his artistic education under the third master of his line, Kiyomitsu I.; but while continuing the special theatrical practice of his forerunners, he produced as well a series of beautiful prints, which had little in common with any before made. Kiyonaga gives colour its full task in his designs, but his line and composition are also exquisite, and the influence he exerted on his late contemporaries must have been overwhelming. Under him the number of colour-blocks used increased considerably, and it is to him that we owe the setting of the fashion of portraiture of the frail beauties of the Yoshiwara, the following of which inspired Shunchō, Utamaro, Yeishi, Yeizan, Kiyomine, and their fellows, to much of their best work. He died in 1815, and must have continued at work very nearly till that year.

KIYO-



NAGA

Amid this development of beauty and fine colour, a curious individuality displays itself. Sharaku, who worked about the year 1790 for a short time only, produced a series of portraits of actors, which,

SUMMER EVENING ON THE SUMIDA RIVER

for their strange insistence on peculiarities of feature, can only be described as realistic caricatures. Nevertheless, the drawing of them is so masterly that they exercise a curious fascination on the beholder. They met with no success, and the artist soon disappeared again into obscurity, little dreaming of the vogue his few and almost grotesque productions were to have among the collectors of a far, and to him unknown, land.

CHAPTER V

THE GREAT PERIOD

AS pointed out in the last chapter, in the work of Kiyonaga and his associates was seen the final perfecting of the technique of colour-printing. We have now to deal with a group of artists, who, if not superior in artistic merit to the last, yet added the benefit of their labours to talents of an order quite as high, and so stand somewhat above them.

KITA-GAWA UTA-MARO

Utamaro, who is placed by common repute at the head of them, was the son and pupil of an artist of distinction, Toriyama Sekiyen. He was of reckless and dissolute habits from his early youth ; and when still young was disowned

by his father, finding a home and work in the employment of the well-known print-seller Tsutaya. His whole career was one of dissipation, which culminated in a term of imprisonment for libelling the Shogun. This finally broke his health, and he died at the age of fifty-three in 1806.

With the exception of a few landscapes, scenes of the New Year, and an exquisite book of insects, Utamaro devoted himself entirely to the portraiture of low-class women. This class of subject he treated with a rare refinement. His composition is extraordinarily fine ; the grace and variety of his lines far above anything ever attained by even the greatest of his predecessors. The large busts in which the massing of the blacks forms so novel and telling a feature, were very delicately tinted in colours that fading has softened almost beyond recognition in the majority of instances ; but even in what is left, the hand of a master can easily be traced. His best work was produced during the Japanese periods Anyei and Temmei (A.D. 1772–1789) ; later, he became somewhat enslaved to his own conventions ; and his last prints, though filled with high qualities, have lost the vigour and originality of those of his youth. At the end of

his life he was overwhelmed with commissions; and when at work adopted devices, almost mechanical, for coping with it. And after his death—even before it—his style was copied and his signature forged to an extent which makes it necessary for the collector to set himself a very high standard in selecting these prints; and rigidly to reject many examples, even though they bear the well-known handwriting of the artist and have unmistakable evidences of antiquity.

The first Japanese colour-prints that came to Europe were almost certainly those of Utamaro. We know, from Japanese sources, that there was a large demand for them among the Dutch at Nagasaki; and among the collection of M. Isaac Titsingh, who died in Paris in 1812, were a number of engravings answering exactly to the description of them.

Chobunsai Yeishi, a contemporary of Utamaro, was a member of the famous old family of Fujiwara, and of *Samurai* rank. He, too, was of loose life; but of a great delicacy in his art. His colour is excellent, but he falls behind Utamaro in originality of composition, and in daring line: rather approximating, in the arrangement of his subjects,

THE LOVE LETTER

(*From the Series of "The Twelve Hours"*)

to the more formal methods of Kiyonaga. He was the head of a small group which acquired the name of the Hosoda School.

The third of the great masters of this time—excluding the greatest of all, Hokusai, who stands by himself—was the first Toyokuni. Toyokuni was a pupil of Toyoharu, and it is also certain that he studied the styles of Katsukawa Shunyei, and of Ichiō. He was born in the year Meiwa 6 (A.D. 1769) and died in Bunsei 8 (A.D. 1825). It is recorded that, at his death, several hundred of his drawings were buried with him, and a monument was raised to his memory by his surviving pupils.

Toyokuni was an artist of as great powers as any of the preceding, but he deliberately chose a path which, however popular in Japan, appeals less to the European sense of beauty than does that of Utamaro. His early prints show strongly the influence of Kiyonaga. Some of them might well be mistaken, were it not for the signature, sometimes for the work of Utamaro and sometimes for that of Yeishi. In common with many of his contemporaries, it is certain that when his personal work was unpopular he sought to make money by imitating—probably forging even—that of Utamaro. On the other

hand, Utamaro's attempts on the popularity of Toyokuni did not lead him beyond his own style —and they failed. But the greatest powers of Toyokuni were reserved for his pictures of actors in character. No one ever succeeded better in portraying the favourites of the Japanese stage, and in so doing with a result at the same time more artistic or more realistic. The masks and gestures of the actors may seem to us to be exaggerated and the pose forced and unnatural. This, however, is but an accurate rendering of the fact. The Japanese method of acting is widely different from the trivial restlessness of our stage. In it, movement is deliberate and restrained, and the action resolves itself into a succession of poses, held long enough to fix themselves on the eye. These great moments are selected by Toyokuni for his theatrical pictures. The rigidity of the characters is real; but the intensity of passion, the superb point of view and distribution of colour, the direct and sweeping draughtsmanship are due to the great skill of the artist.

In technical qualities, pure and simple, we see the Japanese art of colour-printing at its best in Toyokuni. He did not, as has rashly been asserted,

invent the purple which he uses so effectively, or any other colour. But no one before or after surpassed him in his use of solid black, or in his skill in obtaining force by means of contrast. How great he was and how thoroughly, though after a hard struggle, he ultimately succeeded in voicing the popular taste of the Japanese, is shown by the number of his pupils and the duration of his direct influence. While that of Utamaro and even of Hokusai was limited to a few immediate imitators of the next generation only, the number of the pupils of Toyokuni himself was enormous, and that of his pupils' pupils even greater, all following the great master closely in style and thought. So came the decadence.

Inferior to either of the three men dealt with in this chapter, but still to be placed high among the colour-print artists as a whole, are two others, who each followed different paths.

Kikugawa Yeizan was a son and pupil of the painter Yeiji, and afterwards studied under Nanrei. He is best known by his later work, in which he followed Utamaro very closely and with great popular success, greater, indeed, than that achieved by any of the pupils of that master. He was a

friend and fellow-student of Hokkei, and several times imitated closely the methods of Hokusai. But his best productions belong to the former category, and therein he rivals Utamaro in all but the masterpieces of the latter.

Kiyomine, the fifth of the Torii masters, was the grandson of Kiyomitsu and the pupil of Kiyonaga. In his early prints he follows closely the style of the latter and that of the first years of Toyokuni, only taking up the hereditary business of making theatrical posters and programmes on the death of Kiyonaga. During the period Tempō he changed his name to Kiyomitsu, after which he made but few colour-prints. He lived to the great age of eighty-two years, and died in 1868. His early prints have a singular grace and delicacy. His colour is good, and if his final result is slighter than that of his masters, it will, nevertheless, be found to possess an enduring charm. Most of the prints of this quality were produced by him between the years 1804 and 1819.

With some few exceptions, dealt with in later chapters, we now come to the end of substantial originality in the colour-prints of Japan. The themes were made, the conventions fixed, the

technique perfected and at its best. Henceforth the bulk of prints produced are in principle but variations of those of the leaders. They are still charming, good in many ways, often approximating to their models; but, without these, they probably would not have existed. For that reason we place many of the pupils of the artists referred to above in the chapter dealing with the decay of the art.

CHAPTER VI

HOKUSAI

AMONG the whole of the artisan-painters of the colour-print school, one man only was possessed of intellect, courage, and capability enough to break away entirely from its traditions and establish himself as a leader. While the others were content to follow precedent, both in subject and treatment of it, exercising their skill only within the limitations already imposed by tradition; Hokusai alone looked out upon life with an unfettered eye, and sought to render faithfully what he saw therein. He is the true embodiment of his school, so fitly entitled by the Japanese *Ukiyoye*—Mirror of the Passing World!

Hokusai was born in the ninth month of the tenth year of the period Horeki, that is to say,

between the 9th October and the 8th November of 1760 of our era. His father was Nakajima Ise, a maker of mirrors in the employment of the Shogun, but essentially an artisan ; his mother, a grandchild of one of the retainers of Kira, who died in defence of his master in the great tragedy of the Forty-Seven Rōnin. As a mere child, he was apprenticed to an engraver, and even practised as a book-illustrator at the early age of fourteen or thereabouts. When he was eighteen years of age he became a pupil of Shunshō, succeeding in the style of his master well enough to gain from the latter the gift of the name of Shunrō. From this his inveterate originality soon obtained his expulsion. He was guilty of two offences, one a sudden inquisition into the style of the Kano School, and the other the painting of a sign for a bookseller in a manner which his master considered a disgrace to himself. Shunshō's chief pupil, Shunkō, tore up the sign before the eyes of Hokusai, and the latter abandoned the studios of the masters for ever.

HOKU

SAI

He now for some years applied himself chiefly to book-illustration, but was soon reduced by poverty

to hawking red pepper, calendars, and such small wares about the streets of Yedo. However, a fortunate commission for a banner set him again on his feet; and his production of illustrated books was resumed with success enough for a livelihood. At this time he seems to have made many of the beautiful *surimono* which are so justly prized nowadays by collectors.

In a short essay of this nature one cannot find space for a detailed account of the struggles and successes of Hokusai. A short summary must suffice. Thus from 1789 onwards he collaborated largely with the great novelist Bakin, a partnership which endured, with intervals, for over twenty years; and this period saw further developments in his style, as well as a continuance of independent researches into those of the Tosa School, and of Shiba Kokan, who had made himself acquainted at Nagasaki with some of the principles of European art. In 1817 he made a visit to the town of Nagoya, staying with his friend Bokusen; and here, in what we must consider, perhaps, the happiest circumstances of his life, he inaugurated one of his greatest works, the "Hokusai Mangwa."

This wonderful encyclopædia of Japanese life

One of the „Thirty-six Views of Fuji“

(Coloured woodcut)

and art consists of fifteen volumes in all, of which two were published after the master's death, and the others at varying dates before that occurrence. They are printed in light tints of black and red, and contain studies of every imaginable kind, drawn with rare vigour and fidelity ; street scenes, caricatures, architecture, patterns, birds, beasts, and flowers in marvellous profusion, and all of high excellence. Had Hokusai done nothing but this his fame would still be high.

The remaining years of his life saw further developments of his art. The "Hundred Views of Fuji," in the same method of printing as the "Mangwa," and the "Thirty-Six Views" of the same mountain, in large *format*, and in execution more in the style of the broadsheets, are perhaps his best works of this later period. But the "Waterfalls," "Famous Bridges," and "Views of the Loo-choo Islands," "Tōkaidō," and "Twelve Scenes from the Chushingura," are well worthy of the great artist.

His more advanced years were much troubled. His son-in-law, Shigenobu, was a constant source of distress, a fire destroyed all his studies, and his carelessness in money matters kept him in continual

poverty. But he never lost heart; and his artistic powers seemed to wax rather than to wane. He died at last on the eighteenth day of the fourth month of the second year of Kayei (10th May 1849).

Hokusai left many pupils, of whom Hokkei most nearly approached him as an imitator: while Teisai Hokuba was perhaps the greatest painter. Gakutei, the designer of *surimono*, is elsewhere referred to; and others of note were Hokuga, Isai, Shigenobu, Hokujiu, and Hokuyei.

Hokusai is the one Japanese artist whose name has been adequately learned by European critics. It is a commonplace among them to write or speak of him as the greatest of Japanese painters; and to give him rank of the highest among those of the whole world. From our point of view this is entirely justifiable. His unsurpassed skill in the technique of his art; his unfailing energy and youth; the amazing directness and accuracy of his art; and the largeness of view and intense human interest with which he invariably succeeds in investing it; all entitle him to his place of honour beside Dürer, Rembrandt, and the other giants. What is astonishing to those of us who know it for a fact, is that, great beyond telling as was his reputa-

ion among the democracy of his own country, the Japanese connoisseurs of painting place him only in the second rank. They cannot forgive him for what, in their eyes, is the vulgarity of his subjects; and for what they consider the mere juggling with colour—to us only a casual evidence of his astonishing mastery of his tools.

But we need attach little importance to this point of view. The Japanese, so completely indued with rare commonsense in things material, is a pure sentimentalist in his æsthetics. And from our broader and perhaps lower standpoint we are able to arrive at a juster estimation of Hokusai's artistic powers, unfettered by merely ethical considerations. We can see, and wonder at, his skill of draughtsmanship, the readiness and directness with which he represents action, the grand simplicity of his means, the new but inevitable solution which he finds for the most abstruse problems in composition, his great gift of good humour. To appreciate his colour, paintings as well as prints must be studied, and therein will be found both strength and subtle harmony. The colour schemes of his prints are not those of his fellows. No one but Hokusai ever dreamed of that telling contrast of red, bright blue and

brown which he used in the set of the "Views of the Loochoo Islands"; or the green, blue, yellow and brown which distinguish his "Thirty-six Views of Fuji" and other sets of landscape: or again, the tenderness with which he ranges the whole gamut of blues and greens in the great designs of the carp.

As a draughtsman pure and simple Hokusai is also a master of the first order. His line is a miracle in its varying force and suggestion. Fine as a single hair, or swelling imperceptibly till it becomes a broken play of light and shade or a mass of solid black, it still flows unworried and without hesitation on its appointed course. In the gift of facile and immediate expression of the artist's thought by means of simple drawing, it is possible that the world has never seen the equal of Hokusai.

The great personal qualities of the man are also by no means to be ignored. It is no slight tribute to his reputation that almost alone among the painters of the Popular School, these details of his life should have been preserved with something like fulness. They show him to have been proud even in the extremest poverty—too proud to let his dignity as a craftsman suffer under any stress of mere physical need. He made many friends. His pupils and followers were

GIRL AT HER TOILET

(Original Drawing)

numerous; his wit kindly, and not without a frequent touch of pathos: his unselfishness equal to the most severe tests. Hokusai was always a poet; and always a student. He knew his worth, but knew better his limitations. He died with these words on his lips, "If Fate had given me but five more years, I should have been able to become a true painter!"

CHAPTER VII

THE DECLINE

IN Chapter V., I indicated the main reasons for placing a number of artists in the period of the decline, although their dates would entitle them to somewhat higher consideration. It is worth while repeating that this classification is due to the fact that their work had already become imitative. Perhaps it were more scientific to say that the great period which saw the perfection of the art of colour-printing, saw also the manifest beginnings of its decay.

So far as the pupils of Utamaro and Yeishi are concerned they may, in a general treatise of this kind, be dismissed in few words. They followed the styles of their respective leaders as closely as their abilities permitted ; and with little distinction. The chief among them were—of the pupils of Yeishi—

Yeiri, Yeishō and Gokei (or Gokyō). These were earlier and correspondingly better than the successors of Utamaro. Indeed, Gokei and Yeishō, as far as their rare prints enable us to judge, were little, if at all, inferior to their leader. The best pupil of Utamaro was Kikumaro, whose later prints are signed Tsukimaro. He worked from 1800 to about 1830, and made some good prints, abandoning this branch of art at the end of his life, and devoting himself exclusively to painting, under the name of Kansetsu. His son, Yukimaro, and pupil Yoshimaro, may also be named, with others of the school, Hidemaro and Shikimaro, who were both contemporary with Kikumaro.

The pupils of Toyokuni were very numerous. Some of the earlier, notably Kunimasa, Kunimitsu, Kunihisa, and Kuninao, almost equalled him in the early prints of actors which they produced at the same time as he was doing his best work of this kind. And the same is to be said of his son, Gosotei Toyokuni, whose prints are still commonly ascribed to the elder artist, and whose separate existence was not acknowledged by European critics until I pointed it out in 1895. His work has a certain individualism which distinguishes it. His colour is good ; and his

drawing, of somewhat excessive angularity, is not without force.

The confusion that has arisen in the minds of writers and collectors as to the proper attribution of the hundreds of prints with the signature *Toyokuni*, is due to the circumstance that Kunisada, the greatest and most prolific of all the pupils of the first of the name, habitually signed himself therewith. He was born in 1785, and by the second decade in the nineteenth century had gained such popularity in Yedo, Kyōto and Ōsaka that he entirely eclipsed his master in the estimation of the Japanese; an undoubted fact for which one is quite unable to account, inasmuch as his early style, though clever, is certainly inferior to that of Toyokuni I. He soon took the title of the Second Toyokuni; and in 1845 adopted the name without qualification; and so used it mainly until his death in 1864.

In the beginning Kunisada's prints follow pretty closely those of Toyokuni; but they become more and more mechanical as he grows older. Nevertheless there is always a reminiscence of the old distinction; even in his very latest productions: and certain prints inscribed by him as having been made in the two last years of his life, are in drawing but little

ACTOR IN THE PLAY "SUKEROKU"

("*A Night in the Yoshiwara*")

inferior to those of his best period. It must not be forgotten, also, that he was of a personal character very different to that of Hokusai. He was not too scrupulous; and doubtless earned his living, as a rule, with as little artistic exertion as possible.

One other man stands out among the crowd of mediocrities that devoted themselves too closely to the Toyokuni tradition. Kuniyoshi was born in 1788. His first trade was that of a dyer of silk; but he soon became fascinated by the colour-prints, and attached himself to Toyokuni, working especially with Kuninao, who influenced him greatly. At first he had little popular success; but this trouble once overcome he seems to have flourished considerably. About the end of the period Bunsei (1818–1829) he began the publication of one of his best series, the "Hundred and Eight Chinese Heroes." Later, the increasing intercourse with the nations of Europe gave Kuniyoshi opportunities of studying its art, of which he availed himself to a considerable extent. His later prints display this influence in a most marked manner; and it says much for his talent that the result is far less incongruous than were the attempts of most other Japanese artists who made the same experiment between 1860 and 1890.

The pupils of Kunisada and Kuniyoshi are far too numerous to mention in a volume of this size. Those of Kunisada adopted the prefix *Sada* or *Kuni*, and those of Kuniyoshi that of *Yoshi* for the most part; and by these indications they can be roughly sorted out. The characteristics of their work are those of the whole period from 1830 to about 1865: an increase in the number of blocks used, and corresponding loss of the force and simplicity of the earlier masters, being the chief. This is accompanied by a gradual deterioration in the quality of the printing; a mosaic of many and bright colours taking the place of the carefully wrought gradation of fewer tints which is so fine in older examples. After about 1850 the colours themselves begin to lose their beauty, owing to the use of European instead of the old native pigments. They are muddy, and clog the blocks; particularly, an aniline violet is frequently employed with disastrous effect on the general scheme. Only one further development, apart from that most important growth of landscape work, is to be noted: and this has many redeeming features. Kuniyoshi made fine historical scenes of battles and the like: and the fashion was well followed by his pupils. These prints, generally in

three but sometimes in five sheets, are often extremely effective. They are always interesting and deserve more attention than they have hitherto received. It must be said, too, that the battle-pictures and theatrical scenes, though of the late epoch despised by collectors, have splendid decorative quality : and even at this time surpass, from every point of view, any colour-printing from wood-blocks ever produced outside Japan. Kuniyasu, a fourth pupil of Toyokuni, who died young, is also worth noting.

Before dismissing this period, it is necessary to retrace our steps to consider briefly a few artists who worked more or less independently of those just discussed. Of these, Keisai Yeisen deserves some attention. He studied first under a Kanō painter, Haku-keisai, and then under Yeiji, a pupil of Yeishi, with whom he lived. He was most erratic in his life, and many tales are told of his unreliability in his dealings with publishers and of the dissipation in which he indulged. He alternated from the designing of colour-prints to the making of kites and other toys ; until towards the end of the period Tempō (1830–1843) he stopped painting altogether, for the quaint reason that it was better

for him to discharge his patrons than that, by reason of the decay of his powers, they should desert him; and died in 1848. He made, chiefly, pictures of women in what one may term a style derived from Utamaro; but his landscapes are of some value, and in more than one instance he collaborated with Hokusai. His pupil Teisai Senchō is worth mentioning.

Shunsen, a pleasing artist of the second rank, was a pupil successively of the painter Tsumi Tōrin, Shunrin, and, finally, of Shunyei, though his work shows few traces of the influence of the latter. He used the name Shunkō II. in addition to that by which he is more generally known. His prints of women are often meritorious, especially certain two-sheet compositions, in which the sheets are placed vertically. These were mounted on rollers and used as *kakemono*. He also made a pretty series of landscapes, in the colour-scheme of which rose-pink, brown, and a bright green, play the principal parts. Soon after the year 1820 he devoted himself to pottery-painting. Another earlier pupil of Shunyei (or, perhaps, of Shunshō) is Shunzan, who is only known by a few fine prints, in the style rather of Kiyonaga, and one or two remarkable landscapes.

In this place reference may be made to a remarkable and somewhat rare class of colour-print produced by most of the foregoing artists about the year 1830 or later. These deal with the usual subjects, but they are printed in imitation of the fine Chinese porcelain of the Ming period. The prevailing colour is always an exquisite blue, and this is enhanced, sometimes with touches of deep red, and sometimes with the addition of a bright apple-green.

Hiroshige II. made a series of fan-shaped landscapes in this method, which are possibly his highest attainment, and one or two pupils of Kunisada, as well as that artist himself, Kuniyoshi, and Yeisen also used the device.

Practically all the prints we have hitherto considered were published at Yedo (the modern Tōkyō), and the artists who made them lived in that city. But from about the year 1820 a number begin to appear in Ōsaka, and for about five-and-twenty years this city had a very large output, employing quite a number of men. These appear to have been mainly pupils of Shunyei, Kunisada, and Hokusai. The connection of the second and third of these artists is well known, but it is

curious that the great influence of Hokusai should be so slightly in evidence in the work of the Ōsaka artists trained by him. The style of the whole group is singularly uniform, and is a mixture of those of Shunyei and Kunisada. The subjects treated are almost uniformly theatrical—portraits of actors, generally in character, or scenes from famous plays. The technique is often extraordinarily good. It is more closely allied to that of the *surimono* than to the Yedo picture; the use of metallic dusts and a certain brightness of colour and sharpness of outline being characteristic of the best specimens. The figures are drawn with the angularity of the school of Shunshō, and the draperies somewhat stiffly arranged: Among the chief artists of the Ōsaka school, for so it may be called, are Ashiyuki, Hirosada, Hokushū, Hokuyei, Sadafusa, Sadahiro, Sadanobu, Shigeharu, and Kochōyen Shunshō.

CHAPTER VIII

HIROSHIGE AND HIS SCHOOL

THE period which saw colour-printing in Japan far advanced on a course so soon to result in its utter decay, was yet that of the rise and development of a new departure in the art, of surprising vigour and originality. The representation of landscape by means of colour-prints was in itself no new thing. During the latter part of the eighteenth century occasional examples had been published, while during this period the use of landscape backgrounds was distinctly increasing. Of these, one may refer particularly to the five-sheet prints by Shunchō, Utamaro, and Toyokuni I. A contemporary and fellow-student of the latter artist, Toyohiro, made some good landscapes, somewhat in the Chinese style, in which the figures are quite

subordinated; and it is to him that we owe, in a measure, the great advance that was now to come in this direction, for he was the master of the first Hiroshige.

HIRO-SHIGE (I)

Painted

Hiroshige I. (for so he must be called, to distinguish him from two pupils who adopted his name) has been the subject of so much admiration among Europeans, and of so many mis-statements, that no excuse is needed for a brief summary of the few facts of his life, only within the last year become authentically clear to us. His ability as a draughtsman was displayed even at the age of ten; and when only fifteen, he decided to adopt art as his profession and sought admission, for this purpose, to the studio of Toyokuni I. (about 1811 A.D.). Toyokuni, however, had no room for him; but by the friendly offices of a bookseller he was received into that of Toyohiro, with whom he remained until the death of his master. When beginning life on his own account, he at first tried the theatrical style, at that time in the height of its popularity; but, failing, removed to Kyōto, where he published a set of views of the old capital of the Mikado, and so established

SUNSET

himself in popular favour. He then returned to Yedo with a strong and definite line of his own, from which he only departed to indulge his love of caricature. He never afterwards drew subjects of actors or of women, as did his fellows. His death occurred at Yedo, on the 6th day of the 9th month of the Japanese year Ansei 5 (A.D. 1858).

In considering the work of this great artist—great among those of the whole world—we must discuss for a moment his relationship to the many fine painters of landscape which Japan has produced. These latter are the true Impressionists. Their object was the presentment of a noble thought inspired by a landscape, rather than the landscape itself: the means by which they sought to attain this end, a careful and rigid elimination of all subordinate detail which might distract the eye from the chief elements of the composition—the characters, if one may be permitted the use of the metaphor, chosen to tell the tale. A Japanese landscape (of the high schools) is never finished right up to its edges. It rarely shows strong contrasts, but rather a delicate harmony of colour. The composition is profoundly subtle, and the eye inevitably led by few and almost imperceptible steps to the central point of

the picture. Lines are drawn with distinct individuality, peculiar to each school, and within that again to each artist; so that the Japanese expert recognises the touch of a painter much as we know the handwriting of a friend.

But the colour-print artists adopted a method widely differing from this. In the first place, their compositions closely and evenly fill the whole of the panel—in European style, in fact. They are dependent far more on mass than on line; and this latter has rarely any individuality. The colour-arrangement is quite arbitrary; and the whole result resolves itself into a purely decorative scheme, saturated with convention; but, at its best, absolutely charming. These differences are due in a large measure to the demands of technique.

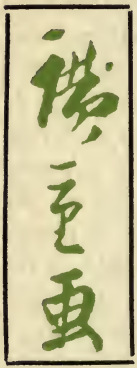
The landscapes of Hokusai, elsewhere discussed, are more akin to those of the painters than are those of Hiroshige I. and the other designers of colour-prints, who all followed the method of the latter. The general lines on which he worked were those above indicated. His distinctive qualities are a superb instinct for colour and composition; a realistic and often humorous treatment of the figure; and an absolute mastery of aerial perspective, ob-

tained by simple but effective devices. No artist who ever lived has succeeded better than the first Hiroshige in rendering the sentiment of a landscape : the tenderness of dawn and sunset, the wind over the rice-fields, the half-light of a village street in the evening-time ; the beat of rain ; the silence of deep sorrow. He was a prolific worker ; but, in a brief essay such as this, one need do no more than indicate a few of his best productions. Among these are to be named the several sets of the Tōkaido—that wonderful road from Yedo to Kyōto, along which all the life of old Japan passed, in the days before railways invaded the land ; the eight views of Lake Biwa; and some of the views of Yedo and its neighbourhood which were so popular among the lower *samurai* visiting that city.

As already hinted, Hiroshige had two pupils, to whom, following the practice of his craft, he gave his own name. The most important of these had, in the eyes of most European critics, entirely lost his identity in that of his master, until, in " Japanese Illustration," I pointed out that the work then universally attributed to the first, really showed many evidences of having been executed by two different hands. This second Hiroshige was an adopted son

of the first, called also Hironobu. He assisted his master for a considerable time, and there is no doubt that many of the prints with the signature of the second were really only amplifications by the latter of sketches or designs by the former. But a few years after the death of Hiroshige I. his successor fell into some unnamed disgrace, which compelled him to leave Yedo. He moved to Yokohama and took the name of Hirochika II., but does not seem to have issued any more colour-prints.

HIRO-SHIGE (II)



Painted

His work has many of the qualities of that of his master ; but, in the drawing of the figure and the ease of the composition, falls considerably behind it. His signature can, as a rule, be easily recognised ; and it is to him that most of the upright compositions are to be attributed, though, as said above, many of them may be based on the sketches of the first of the name. Notable instances of this are the "Hundred Views of Yedo" and the "Thirty-six Views of Fuji," both published very soon after the great man's death.

Collection Bing, Paris

THE SHORE OF THE INLAND SEA, HARIMA PROVINCE

The third artist of the name, Ando Tokubei (called Shigemasa), was also adopted by Hiroshige I., and all three must have worked together for some years. He was at first known, officially so to speak, by the title of Hiroshige III.; but, when the second had to leave Yedo, the third took up his mantle, and henceforth was recognised as Hiroshige II. He lived until 1896, and, departing from the custom of his master, made many prints of women in the manner of the decadence.

The style of landscape inaugurated by Hiroshige I. endured but for a little while. It was practised by several other artists, Gosotei Toyokuni being the earliest and best of the imitators. Others were pupils of Kunisada and Kuniyoshi, of little individual importance save in one instance—for the really great artist, Kyōsai, in his early days, made a number of landscapes of small merit, in the later style of the Hiroshige, using the *nom de pinceau* of Chikamaro.

CHAPTER IX

MODERN COLOUR-PRINTS

THE art of colour-printing in Japan reached its lowest point between 1870 and 1880. The old colours had by then been entirely abandoned for cheaper importations, and these did not lend themselves easily to the old processes of printing. The old themes had been worried almost to death, and even the two or three of the old artists who survived, produced during this time nothing comparable to their earlier efforts. Perhaps this was not entirely a natural decay. The state of ferment and unrest into which the whole country was thrown by the great upheaval of society in 1868 may have contributed thereto.

One artist alone, by virtue of his great talents, stands out clearly in this dark time. And even at the worst of it, with the worst colours, his prints are

of high interest and value. Shojō Kyōsai was born at Koga in the year 1831. While still a boy, he worked for a short time with Kuniyoshi, but received the essentials of his artistic training from Kanō Dohaku, a painter. The common assertion that he was a pupil of Hokusai is entirely without foundation. After he left Dōhaku, he, however, adopted the style of the Popular School instead of that of his teacher, and put it to bitter use in the form of political caricatures during the revolution and the years that followed. No less than three times he was imprisoned, only to derive from the experience new subjects for his facile brush. He drew with wonderful ease, and an irrepressible sense of humour of the broadest description. He was a keen lover of life as he found it, proud of his art and careless of aught else: another Hokusai had he chosen.

His early prints, under the signature Chikamaro, show little promise of what was to come. They are formal landscapes for the most part—compared with those of Hiroshige—of a very debased kind. But his later productions and his fine book-illustrations are filled with good qualities, while his slight sketches to illustrate proverbs and fairy

tales have never been surpassed. Kyōsai died in 1889.

About the year 1890 a new class of colour-print begins to appear. It had by now been realised by the Japanese that printing with the new colours entailed severe modifications of the old process. These could not be made up into a semi-opaque mass on a deeply cut block. For the most part they were aniline and demanded a slighter treatment, giving in return a greater transparency. Add to this a want of vigour on the part of both designer and wood-engraver : the result being a print, pretty and even beautiful, adequately engraved and delicately tinted, but not to be compared for a moment with the virile works of even only fifty years before.

Quite a number of artists are now working in this renascence. But the leader of it, Yoshitoshi, a pupil of Kuniyoshi, died in 1892. He kept the old traditions for a long while; but with that marvellous versatility which seems the strongest characteristic of the whole nation, seems to have abandoned them without a struggle. His new prints are quite the best of the new school ; but it is to this category that they essentially belong. His pupil, Toshikata, when he keeps away from things European, is a

graceful artist, and Kiyokata, a young pupil of Toshikata, already shows promise.

Yoshu Chikanobu, a pupil of Kunichika, is another artist who has lived long enough to practise both methods. With Utamaro as his model, he perhaps follows the old way more closely than most of his fellows. He must be of a great age, but in 1902 was still alive and at work. Miyagawa Shuntei, Tomioka Yeisen, are both excellent painters, the former having a decided gift for landscape. Of the younger men, perhaps Ogata Gekko is the best. He is a painter of considerable reputation in Japan at the present time, belonging to the Shijō or Naturalistic School—a clever artist who has, in recent years, received more than one official reward.

One cannot help feeling, however, that colour-printing in Japan has lost its individuality. It is no longer the peculiar art of the lower orders, and tends more and more to sink to the level of a mere process of reproduction. To this use it has been put in some notable modern instances—the painter, Watanabe Seitei, for example, has had a number of sketches beautifully reproduced by its means—but they have nothing in common with the old *nishikiye*, and might as well have been drawn for chromo-

lithography, or the three-colour process. The last books of this class, which really show in their drawing and design a fine consideration for the engraver and printer, are the beautiful bird and flower studies (1881–1892) of Kono Bairei, who died in 1894, and the illustrations of plant-form by Imao Keinen (1891–92).

It may be remarked, in conclusion, that the line of separation in social matters, between the colour-print designer and the painter of the old schools, is no longer rigidly drawn; although, as a class, the former have not yet gained for their art the recognition which it would receive as a matter of course in this country. But individual artists who practise it are received on equal terms by other painters, and even honoured when they deserve it; while the gradual return of the many Japanese who have of recent years studied art in Europe, will doubtless sweep away any remaining traces of the old division.

Perhaps this is the most fitting place for the author to venture on a brief appeal to Japanese artists to avoid imitations of European work. Of late years some among them have seen fit, naturally enough, perhaps, to try their hands at the Western

methods of painting; and Japanese Impressionists, Japanese of the Barbizon school, Japanese of *L'Art Nouveau*, and of the wilder sects of Southern Germany, have come again to their own land with pride and misunderstanding, bearing with them sheaves of pictures curiously wrought in the fashions of the masters of their choice. Others have tried to blend the Eastern and Western arts, so radically and immovably opposite. Always the result is failure. It could not be otherwise.

All of the Japanese schools of painting—some reaching back to immemorial ages—are living, while so many of ours are dead. The Japanese painters have methods and a technique developed out of the very heart of the national character. Their art has a noble history and a place supreme in the love and literature of their country. In the name of all that is beautiful let them keep it there, and not adulterate and defile it with the scraps and off-scourings of the alien!

CHAPTER X

SURIMONO

ALMOST independently of the broad-sheets, another development of the art of colour-printing in Japan deserves far more attention than it has hitherto received. A pleasant custom existed in that country from the third quarter of the eighteenth, to about the middle of the nineteenth century, of commemorating the New Year, the great festivals, and the special occasions and landmarks of private life, by the circulation among friends, of small pictorial devices, generally accompanied with allusive poems—just as, in effect, we send Christmas, birthday, or Easter cards. These were called *surimono* (things printed), and they are the very luxury of the art from a technical point of view.

The name is well chosen, for in no other form of

colour-printing is so great a refinement displayed. The beauty of line, the brilliancy of colouring, the accuracy of register, and the telling use of *gauffrage* and of metal dusts, combine to produce an unequalled effect. The general daintiness of the idea conveyed, the happy punning of the little poems, and the delicate suggestion of the device are, of course, beyond our uninstructed appreciation. These qualities may be taken for granted, with—following the inspiration of the fine craftsmanship splendidly visible—but a little exercise of faith.

Some of these were certainly made for sale by the professional designers; more were produced by them for their own private purposes. And, among the signatures, one meets those of many of men unidentified with any of the arts or crafts; amateurs, doubtless, who with the wonderful artistic facility of the Japanese, had little difficulty in indicating the chosen device to the engraver, and leaving to him and to the printer the adequate execution of it.

The subjects were not, as already hinted, confined to great popular festivities. By far the larger number of *surimono* met with are associated with the New Year, and these are decorated with every imaginable token of good luck, long life, and pros-

perity ; the seven gods of Good Fortune and their wonderful treasure-ship being among the most often honoured. But the birth of a son, a particularly successful meeting of a club of artisan-poets, the adoption of a new profession, or a change of name were commemorated in this charming manner. Of the last, a famous and most interesting instance is that issued by Kunisada when he took the name of Toyokuni II. in the seventh day of the New Year 1844, and sent to his friends a fine portrait of himself with the notification. The figure is not invariably found in *surimono;* on the contrary, many consist of ingeniously arranged groups of implements, drums, flowers, tobacco-boxes, dolls, and the like, each always with its special significance.

Surimono seem first to have appeared in the second half of the eighteenth century—in the form of colour-prints, at all events. The Japanese tradition places the invention of them as early as the period Genwa (A.D. 1616–1623), when Katsushika Hōkyūshi employed Chikamatsu Ryūsai to engrave for this purpose, on cherrywood, a picture of a pine branch. But Koriusai was the first artist to produce them in quantity, and a series of birds made by him with this intent ranks among his finest work.

PANEL-PICTURE

Shunshō executed some rare and beautiful specimens, as also did Utamaro and others, though these are all surpassed by the exquisite little compositions of Hokusai and some of his pupils—veritable gems of the printer's art, most delicately drawn, and tinted in green, rose-pink, yellow, and brown. These belong to the great artist's first period. In his later days he used a bolder method and more vivid colouring, as well as greater dimensions.

One artist is known almost exclusively by his *surimono;* and, with the exception last named, is to be placed before all others who engaged in the work. Harunobu Gakutei (not to be confused with the great Harunobu) has left practically no record of his life beyond his work. We only know that he was a pupil and at the same time a friend of Hokusai; that he was a book illustrator of great merit as well as an author; and that he must have been at the height of his powers in 1823, when one of his best books was published. His *surimono* show a rare precision of line and selection of colour. They are finished with extraordinary minuteness; and have a sentiment which, allowing for the difference of the convention, makes them by no means remotely comparable to the best work of

our pre-Raphaelite School. In the same category with Gakutei, one is inclined to place a rare artist, Harukawa Goshichi, who, at about the date mentioned above, was working at Kyōto. His few *surimono* are very graceful, perhaps even more so than those of Gakutei, but he has not the range of subject of that master.

The other leading designers of *surimono* are chiefly pupils of Hokusai. Among them one would instance Hokuba, who made some examples in the fine early style of his master, and hardly to be distinguished therefrom except by the signature ; and Hokkei, a bold and prolific draughtsman, whose work belongs to Hokusai's later period. We have already remarked that Hokkei was only a fish hawker before he adopted art as a profession. One of his best *surimono* gives pleasant evidence of the fact that in after years he by no means considered his change of occupation to have altered his social rank. It represents just such another fish seller as he himself had been—perhaps himself even—selling the first fish caught in the New Year.

Most of the well-known designers of broadsheets made *surimono* from time to time. By Utamaro, are to be found a few ; notably one set, of which the

subject is the formal arrangement of flowers, that curious art which in the hands of the Japanese has been reduced to the rigid definition of a science. Toyokuni and his son, Kunisada, Kuniyoshi, and Yeisen, are by no means unrepresented; and among artists unknown but for these small prints, Nih deserves mention for his charming landscapes.

The art seems to have died away by about 1850 or 1860, coincidently with the final decay of good colour-printing in Japan. Indeed, without a high standard in this form of craftsmanship it could not flourish; and, while our own generation has seen something of a revival in the production of the broadsheet, a renascence of the *surimono* does not seem to have been attempted. The last maker of them of importance was an Ōsaka man, Hanzan, who flourished at about the above date. Many of his *surimono* are of large size, larger even than the broadsheets, and though the design is still good, the printing has already lost its delicacy and refinement. His prints date from about 1845 to 1855.

CHAPTER XI

INFLUENCES IN EUROPEAN ART

NOTHING is more intangible than an alleged influence in the work of an artist. Very easily can the critic deceive himself. He can read into his subject almost whatever his heart desires—if only he has faith and enthusiasm enough. In painting, especially, small resemblances, little identities of manner or of arrangement, must not be over-valued. There may be nothing in them more than mere coincidence; than the one natural suggestion which similar circumstances might give to any two alert and receptive intellects; than the outcrop, in different places, of the great universal truths underlying all art.

When the influence-hunter undertakes the comparative study of Japanese and European art —especially if but slightly equipped with sound

knowledge or either—he is apt at first to have good sport. But he must play the game fairly on both sides; and should he do so, will probably ere long stand amazed at the results of his own ingenuity.

Yet the question of what one painter, or school of painters, owes to another, is not to be lightly disregarded. But it must be discussed with some care as to the existence of definite evidence. The fact of contact between the two forces needs to be ascertained; as far, at all events, as reasonable presumption. And the negative side of the matter, what the one school has taught the other to avoid, had better be let alone altogether. Since the discovery—for it was no less, on our part—of Japanese art, a habit of hasty generalisation on the subject has been somewhat prevalent. It has been assumed that many things which did not accord with our elder conventions—especially in decorative art—were "Japanese" in idea: these ranging from the use of geometrical forms to designs which the critic is generally pleased to dub accidental. And the adoption of little trivial devices avowedly borrowed from the art of Japan, has been considered reason enough to write down the whole work of the user, as inspired by the influence of that country.

In the pictorial art of Western nations, the influence of the Japanese painters simply does not exist. The spirit which inspires the latter is not understood, and the paintings themselves are, for all practical purposes, unknown. But the colour-prints, and, in a measure, the wonderful craftsmanship of the Japanese, have undoubtedly exercised a certain directing power on a few painters of note. In an earlier chapter, we have already indicated Degas and Claude Monet as of this number. They themselves recognised the fact and admitted it. And with them may be named Félix Régamey, who spent a considerable time in the Land of the Rising Sun and was greatly impressed thereby.

The suggestion has been made that Dante Gabriel Rossetti was under a similar obligation. This rests on no surer ground than the fact that he was one of the first artists in England to acquire Japanese colour-prints; and that he saw and enjoyed their wonderful qualities. By the kindness of Mr. W. M. Rossetti, the author has been able to inspect many of the actual specimens which belonged to the great pre-Raphaelite painter. They were collected by him about the years 1862 and 1863; and are mainly 3-sheet battle-pieces, or illustrations of

folk-tales, by Kuniyoshi and his pupils ; splendidly decorative, but having absolutely nothing in common with the work of Rossetti at that period or since. There were also a few landscapes by Hiroshige II., which, it is interesting to note, must have found their way to this country almost directly after their publication in Japan ; and one or two of Hokusai's best illustrated books. But they never inspired a single touch of Rossetti's brush.

At the same time another great artist, James McNeill Whistler, was also interesting himself in the colour-prints of Japan. It has become the common cant of criticism to say that Whistler was altogether influenced by them. To some slight extent this may have been true. Possibly he recognised and adopted a few—a very few—of the subordinate devices of the colour-print designers ; but before granting even this, there is a large consideration to be taken into account. The points which are generally indicated as showing the Japanese influence in Whistler, are the arrangement of subordinate details in his earlier paintings, such as the magnificent "Thomas Carlyle" which we reproduce ; the care taken in the placing of his signature ; and the selection by him of subjects such

as the "Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine," or "The Golden Screen"—a truly unstable foundation on which to build. Now it must be remembered that the Japanese have a perfect instinct of decoration. They are—or were—a nation of decorators. In the building of their houses, the laying out of their gardens, in all the small details of their domestic life, this amazing spirit of good taste displays itself. Every little item is rigorously put into its proper place, in relation to its surroundings: the grain of wood, the one picture on the wall, the flower in the vase; and the vase where it inevitably must be seen to best advantage. If Whistler merely borrowed his good taste in these matters from the Japanese, it argues little for his real greatness as an artist. I prefer to think that he had the instinct of decoration within him; and that, in the unfailing rightness of his disposition, of what most other painters have been content to treat as unimportant accessories, he only showed that he, too, possessed this quality of the Japanese, and not that he borrowed it from them. To name but one other master in whom it can be traced, Albrecht Dürer, will probably suffice to close the argument. Against him the charge of subserviency to Japanese

Photo Hanfsdaengl *Glasgow Gallery*

PORTRAIT OF THOMAS CARLYLE

influence can hardly be brought. And, in other respects, the paintings of Whistler are founded on principles quite different to those of the Japanese of any school.

Much the same, in a minor degree, is to be said of the alleged influence of the Japanese on another notable artist, Aubrey Beardsley: in this instance, due probably to a curious tendency to attribute anything unexpected or bizarre to Japan. Beardsley's method of drawing is the exact antithesis of that of the Japanese artists. His pure, unvarying line, would to them stand for a complete negation of character. He, too, possessed the decorative instinct above all; otherwise his art has far more in common with that of the Greek vase-painters than with anything Oriental.

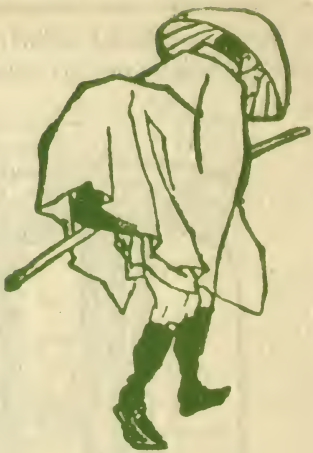
In another phase of art, the cult of the Japanese colour-print has, however, had precise and valuable results. There is no doubt that from this source sprang almost all that was best in the decorative poster, of some years ago. Chéret, Toulouse-Lautrec, Ibels, Steinlen, in France; and Messrs. Dudley Hardy, Browne, Hassall, Aldin, and Edgar Wilson in England have allowed much, directly or indirectly, to these simply printed broadsheets which

give so fine and direct a display of a bold figure perfectly treated for reproduction by block-printing. Indeed, it is not too much to ascribe to the Japanese a very great share in all the most modern development of the illustrative arts. Their prints are the most perfect adaptation of the powers of the artist to this end that have yet been seen.

Again, we must credit the Japanese with having taught us methods, since used to great advantage by our designers—especially of flat pattern. Their treatment of the plant in detail, and their setting out of pattern, have had results which can hardly be over-estimated.

And it would not be fitting to close this brief sketch without a note on the actual attempts to make colour-prints, approximately by the Japanese process, which have been recently undertaken. In England the pioneers of this movement have been J. D. Batten and F. Morley Fletcher; and, with a variation of his own in the process, Mr. Edgar Wilson. On the Continent, MM. Rivière, Lepère, Fraulein Hein of Hamburg, and several other German artists have been more or less successful; though the best work of all has been done by Herr Emil Orlik of Prague, who learned the method

in Japan, and whose prints would rank high even among the later masters themselves of *Ukiyoye.*



MORONOBU

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF ARTISTS

NOTE.—These dates have been, for the most part, derived from Japanese sources; but they have been collated with those given by the chief European writers on the subject. The arrangement into periods is not to be considered as a definite classification so much as a rough guide to the amateur or collector. The years are those of the Christian Era: where precise figures are given they are those of birth and death.

First Period.

	Iwasa Matabei (Matahei) INSPIRER OF SCHOOL	1577–1650
	Katsushige Matabei	*d.* 1673
	Hishikawa Moronobu SON OF EMBROIDERER. CHIEF FOUNDER	1637–1714
1st Torii	Torii Kiyonobu 1st man to colour by blocks.	1664–1729
2nd Torii	Torii Kiyomasu	*c.* 1679–1762
	Okumura Masanobu	1693–1768
	Nishikawa Sukenobu	1671–1751
	Shinchō (Okinobu)	1679–1754
	Ichikawa Toyonobu	1711–1785
	Torii Kiyoharu	
	Torii Kiyotada	
	Torii Kiyoshige	*worked c.* 1720–1760
	Torii Shiro (Kiyonobu II.)	
	Torii Kiyotsune	
	Torii Kiyohiro	
3rd Torii	Torii Kiyomitsu I.	1735–1785
	Katsukawa Terushige	
	Okumura Toshinobu	
	Nishimura Shigenobu Master of Harunobu	*worked c.* 1740–1770
	Ichikawa Toyomasa	
	MASAFUSA	

Second Period.

	Suzuki Harunobu	1705–1772
	Koriusai PUPIL OF ABOVE	*worked c.* 1760–1780
	Shiba Kokan (Harunobu II.)	1747–1818
	Katsukawa Shunshō case C.	1726–1792
	Kitao Kosiusai Shigemasa	1728–1809
	Keisai Kitao Masayoshi	*d.* 1824
	Kitao Masanobu (Kioden)	1761–1816
4th Torii	Torii Kiyonaga (duplicate)	1742–1815

SHARAKU — big heads of actors.	*worked c.* 1790
BUNCHŌ	*d.* 1796

Third Period.

SHUNMAN	*worked c.* 1780–1800
KATSUKAWA SHUNKŌ	*worked c.* 1780–1800
KATSUKAWA SHUNCHŌ — TRYPTCHES	*worked c.* 1785–1810 (*d.* 1827
KATSUKAWA SHUNZAN	*worked c.* 1790–1800
UTAMARO	1753–1805
CHOKI (SHIKŌ)	*worked c.* 1780–1800
CHŌBUNSAI YEISHI (LADY ITSU)	*worked c.* 1780–1800
YEISHŌ	*worked c.* 1790–1800
GOKEI (GOKYO)	*worked c.* 1790–1800
UTAGAWA TOYOHARU	1733–1814
UTAGAWA TOYOHIRO	1773–1828
UTAGAWA TOYOKUNI I.	1769–1825
KATSUKAWA SHUNYEI	1761–1819
HOKUSAI — case I	1760–1849

Fourth Period.

KIKUMARO (TSUKIMARO)	*worked* 1780–1830
KITAMARO	*worked c.* 1800–1820
YOSHIMARO	*worked c.* 1820–1830
HIDEMARO	*worked c.* 1804–1817
SHIKIMARO	*worked c.* 1800–1817
TOSHIMARO	*worked c.* 1810–1830
YUKIMARO	*worked c.* 1820–1830
YEIRI	*worked c.* 1800–1820
YEIZAN — Good. also forged Utamaros.	*worked c.* 1800–1830
TORII KIYOMINE (5TH TORII)	1786–1868
HOKUBA (TEISAI) SENCHO	*worked c.* 1790–1830
SHUNSEN (SHUNKŌ II.)	*worked c.* 1800–1835
KIYOFUSA (6TH TORII. SON OF 5TH)	

pupil of Yeishi { Yeisui / Reisenti Yeiri / Shucho or Shiucho

Shunshi — Shunshen —

Toyokuni Gosotei (Kunishige)	1776–1835
Kunisada (also blue prints)	1785–1864
Kuniyoshi	1788–1861
Kunimasa (Kunisada II)	1772–1810
Kuninaga	*c.* 1770–*c.* 1810
Kunimitsu	*worked c.* 1800–1820
Kuniyasu	*c.* 1805–1836
Kuninao	*worked c.* 1800–1830
Kunitora	*worked c.* 1800–1830
Kunihisa	*worked c.* 1800–1830
Hokkei	*worked c.* 1820–1856
Hokujiu Hokuga Hokuyei Hokushiu Hokumyō Gakutei Ashiyuki	*worked c.* 1820–1840
Keisai Yeisen	1790–1848
Hokusen (Taito	*worked c.* 1830–1853
Hiroshige I.	1796–1858
Hiroshige II.	*worked c.* 1840–1865
Shigenobu	*worked c.* 1830–1855
Goshichi	*worked c.* 1804–1820
Utamaro II.	*worked c.* 1800–1835
Kunimaru	*c.* 1785–*c.* 1816

Fifth Period—1845–1880.

Pupils of Kunisada and Kuniyoshi.*

* These artists, and others, are referred to in detail, in "Japanese Colour-prints" (Victoria and Albert Museum Handbook), by the author of the present work.

Shigehara
Hirokazi
Sekkio
Ruisai Masadzumi
Sugakudo

Case O.
Moderns

Hanzan	
Hiroshige III.	*d.* 1896
Shojō Kyosai	1831–1889
Torii Kiyomitsu	1832–1892

Sixth Period (*modern artists*).

Kōno Bairei	*d.* 1894
Yoshitoshi	1838–1892
Watanabe Seitai	*living in* 1902
Imao Keinen	
Ōgata Gekko	
Toshikata	
Kiyokata	
Yoshu Chikanobu	
Miyagawa Shuntei	
Tomioka Yeisen	

1 Tominobu
1 Shunkio ⊗
3 Rinkoku ×
3 Hisanobu
4 Bunko.
Shinko ×

} School of Utamaro.

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